

WE CLAIM:

1. A distributed application for facilitating collaboration between geographically-dispersed members of a team, comprising:
 - a collaboration services suite adapted to establish a communications session between two or more members of the team using one of a plurality of communications media in response to a request from any one of the team members using dynamic presence and availability information respecting each team member; and
 - a team member interface adapted display the dynamic presence and availability information to each member of the team, and to permit a team member to request initiation by the collaboration services suite of a communications session with at least one other team member.
2. A distributed application as claimed in claim 1 wherein the collaboration services suite maintains detailed information respecting team members and communications devices associated with team members, the detailed information being used to initiate communications sessions on receipt of the request from any team member.
3. A distributed application as claimed in claim 2 wherein the team member interface displays only graphical information respecting other team member's communications devices, and team members initiate a communications session without requiring knowledge of a device type, device location or device address of a

communications device associated with another team member with which a communications session is established by the collaboration services suite.

4. A distributed application as claimed in claim 3 wherein the graphical information displayed by the team member interface is derived in part from an active profile for each team member.
5. A distributed application as claimed in claim 4 wherein the graphical information displayed by the team member interface is derived in part from the dynamic presence information obtained by determining the presence and state of communications devices specified in the active profile.
6. A distributed application as claimed in claim 1 wherein the team member initiates the communications session by selecting a communications icon associated with a personal identifier that represents the at least one other team member.
7. A distributed application as claimed in claim 1 wherein the team member initiates the communications session by opening a communications session initiation window, and dragging a personal identifier that represents the at least one other team member into a predetermined area of the window.
8. A distributed application as claimed in claim 6 wherein the team member opens a communications session initiation window by performing an activation operation using a pointing device, after selecting the communications icon.

9. A distributed application as claimed in claim 6 wherein the communications session initiation window permits the team member to optionally enter a topic to be discussed during the communications session.
10. A distributed application as claimed in claim 9 wherein the communications session initiation window further permits the team member to optionally enter a an invitation message related to the communications session.
11. A distributed application as claimed in claim 9 wherein the communications session initiation window further permits the team member to attach meeting notes input during the communications session.
12. A distributed application as claimed in claim 6 wherein a start communications session message is sent to the collaboration services suite when the team member performs a selection to begin the communications session.
13. A distributed application as claimed in claim 12 wherein the message sent to the collaboration services suite is received by a connection manager that is adapted to initiate the communications session in response to the message received from the team member.
14. A distributed application as claimed in claim 13, wherein the message comprises at least one of:
information indicative of a type of communications session to be initiated; and

a personal identifier associated with the at least one other team member invited to join the communications session.

15. A distributed application as claimed in claim 6, wherein selecting a communications device associated with the other team member is accomplished by selecting one of a plurality of communications icons using one or more of:

information indicative of one of a voice, text or multi-media type of communications session; and preference information provided by the other team member and indicative of one or more preferred communications devices to be used for communications sessions.

16. A distributed application as claimed in claim 1, wherein the collaboration services suite maintains a session record including session information related to respective communications sessions.

17. A distributed application as claimed in claim 16, wherein the session information comprises at least one of:

a participant record identifying each team member participating in the communications session; and a topic of the communications session.

18. A distributed application as claimed in claim 16, wherein the team member interface is adapted to enable a team member to interact with the collaboration services suite to mark the

communications session as either one of a public and a private communications session.

19. A distributed application as claimed in claim 17, wherein the team member interface is adapted to display at least a portion of the session information respecting each public communications session to every member of the team.
20. A distributed application as claimed in claim 17, wherein the team member interface is adapted to display at least a portion of the session information respecting a private communications session to only those members of the team who are participants in the private communications session.
21. A distributed application as claimed in claim 16, wherein the respective session record is archived following completion of the communications session.
22. A distributed application as claimed in claim 1, wherein the collaboration services suite is adapted to facilitate exchange of text messages between team members participating in a communications session.
23. A distributed application as claimed in claim 1, wherein a session window of the team member interface displays for each public communications session at least one of:
 - a team identifier;
 - a discussion topic; and
 - a personal identifier associated with each party to the communications session.

24. A distributed application as claimed in claim 1, wherein a archive record is stored each time a communications session is terminated and the archive record comprises at least one of:

 a communications session type;

 a team identifier;

 a discussion topic;

 a personal identifier associated with each party to the communications session;

 a session start and stop time;

 a session identification number; and

 any text messages exchanged between the parties during the communications session.

25. A distributed application as claimed in claim 24 wherein the personal identifier is a team member identifier if the party is a team member.

26. A distributed application as claimed in claim 1, wherein the collaboration services suite is adapted to track each communications session, and to store an address of a preferred text communications device associated with each team member that is a participant in the communications session, so that text messages associated with the communications session are forwarded to the preferred text communications device of each participant.

27. A distributed application as claimed in claim 26, wherein the selected text communications device is selected using preference information provided by the

respective team member to the collaboration services suite.

28. A distributed application as claimed in claim 22, wherein the collaboration services suite is adapted to:

receive a text message from a party in a communications session; and

forward the text message to the respective text communications device associated with each party to the communications session.

29. A distributed application as claimed in claim 28, wherein the party information further comprises a class identification designating respective parties as one of a participant and a monitor of the communications session.

30. A distributed application as claimed in claim 29, wherein the collaboration services suite is adapted to forward to each party to the communication session any text message related to the communications session that is received from a participant in the communications session, and to discard any text message related to the communications session that is received from a monitor of the communications session.

31. A distributed application as claimed in claim 22, wherein the collaboration services suite is further adapted to enable a new party to join the communications session.

32. A distributed application as claimed in claim 31, wherein, when the new party is a member of the team, the collaboration services suite is adapted to enable the new party to join the communications session as either a monitor or a participant.

33. A distributed application as claimed in claim 32, wherein, when the communications session is a public communications session, the team member interface is adapted to enable a team member to join the public communications session as the new party, independently of an invitation from any existing party to the public communications session.

34. A distributed application as claimed in claim 33, wherein, when the team member joins the public communications session as a participant, the collaboration services suite is adapted to forward a an announcement to each of the parties to the public communications session to advertise of the presence of the new party.

35. A distributed application as claimed in claim 31, wherein the collaboration services suite is adapted to receive an add-message from an existing party to the communications session, the add message containing at least information identifying the new party, and to forward an invitation message to the identified new party inviting the new party to join the communications session.

36. A distributed application as claimed in claim 35, wherein the invitation message comprises at least at one of:

an identifier of the team member who sent the invitation;

a topic of the communications session;

a message related to the discussion;

a list of participants in the communications session;
and

a list of invitees to the communications session.

37. A distributed application as claimed in claim 35, wherein the team member interface is adapted to enable the new party to send a response message to the collaboration services suite in response to the invitation.
38. A distributed application as claimed in claim 37, wherein the response message comprises any one of:
 - a decline message indicating that the new party wishes to decline the invitation;
 - a join message indicating that the new party wishes to join the communications session; and
 - a deferral message indicating that the new party wishes to join the communications session at a later time.
39. A distributed application as claimed in claim 38, wherein, when the response message is a decline message, the collaboration services suite is adapted to forward an invitation declined message to the existing party from which the add-message was received.

40. A distributed application as claimed in claim 38, wherein, when the response message is a join message, the collaboration services suite is adapted to add the new party to the communications session and to notify each party to the communications session that the new party has joined the communications session.
41. A distributed application as claimed in claim 38, wherein, when the response message is a deferral message, the collaboration services suite is adapted to advise the existing parties to the communications session of the deferral.
42. A distributed application as claimed in claim 1, wherein the collaboration services suite is adapted to facilitate voice communications sessions between parties to the communications session.
43. A distributed application as claimed in claim 42, wherein communications session information displayed on the team member interface comprises at least one of:
 - an identifier associated with the team;
 - a personal identifier associated with each party participating in the communications session;
 - text information describing a session topic;
 - a record of one or more meeting notes entered by each party to the communications session; and
 - a record of documents shared by the parties to the communications session.

44. A distributed application as claimed in claim 43, wherein the session topic is defined by a team member at a time of initiation of the communications session.

45. A distributed application as claimed in claim 42, wherein the collaboration services suite is adapted to establish a voice communications session between the parties to the communications session.

46. A distributed application as claimed in claim 45, wherein the voice communications session comprises a two-party voice communications session between first and a second voice communications devices respectively associated with first and second parties to the communications session.

47. A distributed application as claimed in claim 46, wherein each of first and second voice communications devices have respective unique addresses, and the collaboration services suite comprises a virtual switching point adapted to:

- establish a call connection between a first service switching point (SSP) in a switched telephone network (STN) and the first voice communications device;
- establish a call connection between the first SSP and a second SSP in the STN; and
- establish a call connection between the second SSP in the STN and the second voice communications device to enable voice communications between the first and second voice communications devices.

48. A distributed application as claimed in claim 47 wherein the call connection between the first and second voice communications devices is completed in part over first and second Enhanced Integrated Services Digital Network User Part (E-ISUP) trunks in the STN.

49. A distributed application as claimed in claim 46, wherein each of first and second voice communications devices have respective unique extension numbers on an enterprise network connected to the switched telephone network (STN) via a private branch exchange (PBX), and the collaboration services suite sends a connection request message to the PBX to establish a two-party call connection between the first and second voice communications devices within the enterprise network.

50. A distributed application as claimed in claim 45, wherein the voice communications session comprises a multi-party voice communications session between three or more voice communications devices respectively associated with three or more parties to the communications session.

51. A distributed application as claimed in claim 50, wherein each of the voice communications devices have respective unique dial numbers (DNs) in the STN, and the collaboration services suite comprises a virtual switching point (VSP) adapted to establish a call connection between a respective Enhanced Integrated Services Digital Network User Part (E-ISUP) trunk of the STN and each one of the voice communications devices, and to establish a call connection between

each E-ISUP trunk and a conference bridge to enable voice communications between each of the voice communications devices via their respective E-ISUP trunks and the conference bridge.

52. A distributed application as claimed in claim 50, wherein at least two of the communications devices have respective unique extension numbers on an enterprise network connected to the PSTN via a private branch exchange (PBX), and the collaboration services suite is adapted to:

send a connection request message to the PBX to establish a two-party call connection between a first and second voice communications devices on the enterprise network;

send a connection request message to the PBX to establish a third-party call connection between the first voice communications device on the enterprise network and a conference bridge;

send a connection request message to a virtual switching point in the public switched telephone network (PSTN) to establish a call connection between an E-ISUP trunk of the PSTN and a third voice communications device associated with a respective third party to the communications session; and

establish a call connection between the E-ISUP trunk and the conference bridge to enable voice communications between each of the first voice communications devices via the conference bridge.

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53. A distributed application as claimed in claim 43, wherein the collaboration services suite is adapted to enable a new party to join the communications session.

54. A distributed application as claimed in claim 53, wherein, when the communications session is a public communications session, the team member interface is adapted to enable a team member to join the public communications session as the new party, independently of an invitation from any existing party to the public communications session.

55. A distributed application as claimed in claim 53, wherein the collaboration services suite is adapted to:

receive an add-message from an existing party to the communications session, the add message containing at least information identifying the new party; and

forward an invitation message to the identified new party.

56. A distributed application as claimed in claim 38, wherein, when the response message is a join message, the collaboration services suite is adapted to:

add party information identifying the new party to the session display; and

notify each team member involved in the communications session that the new party has joined the communications session.

57. A distributed application as claimed in claim 38 wherein, when the response message is a deferral message, the collaboration services suite is adapted to forward the deferral message to the existing party from which the add-message was received.
58. A distributed application as claimed in claim 53, wherein the communications session comprises an existing two-party voice communications session between first and a second voice communications devices respectively associated with first and second parties to the voice communications session, and the collaboration services suite is adapted to convert the two-party voice communications session into a multi-party voice communications session.
59. A distributed application as claimed in claim 58, wherein when each of the first and second voice communications devices have respective DN's on the PSTN, and the existing two-party voice communications session comprises a voice connection between the first and second voice communications devices via respective first and second E-ISUP trunk, the collaboration services suite comprises a virtual switching point adapted to:
 - release a call connection between the first E-ISUP trunk and the second E-ISUP trunk;
 - establish a call connection between the first E-ISUP trunk and a conference bridge;
 - establish a call connection between the second E-ISUP trunk and the conference bridge;

establish a call connection between a third E-ISUP trunk and a respective third voice communications device associated with the new party; and establish a call connection between the third E-ISUP trunk and the conference bridge.

60. A distributed application as claimed in claim 58, wherein the existing two-party voice communications session comprises a two-party voice connection between first and second voice communications devices having respective unique extension numbers on an enterprise network connected to the PSTN via a private branch exchange (PBX), and the collaboration services suite is adapted to:

send a connection request message to the PBX to establish a third-party call connection between the first voice communications device on the enterprise network and a conference bridge;

send a connection request message to a virtual switching point in the PSTN to establish a call connection between an E-ISUP trunk in the PSTN and a third voice communications device associated with the new party; and

establish a call connection between the E-ISUP trunk and the conference bridge to enable voice communications between each of the voice communications devices via the conference bridge.

61. A distributed application as claimed in claim 53, wherein the communications session comprises an existing multi-party communications session using a conference bridge to connect at least three voice

communications devices respectively associated with existing parties to the communications session, and the collaboration services suite is adapted to join the new party to the existing multi-party communications session.

62. A distributed application as claimed in claim 61, wherein the collaboration services suite comprises a virtual switching point adapted to:

establish a call connection between a respective E-ISUP trunk of the PSTN and the voice communications device associated with the new party; and

establish a call connection between the E-ISUP trunk and the conference bridge to enable voice communications between the each of the voice communications devices via their respective E-ISUP trunk and the conference bridge.

63. A distributed application for facilitating collaboration between geographically-dispersed members of a team, comprising:

a collaboration services suite adapted to establish a multi-media communications session between two or more members of the team in response to a request from any one of the team members using a data network to enable an exchange of video content between data terminals of team members involved in the multi-media communications session, and a switched telephone network to enable exchange of voice content between voice communications devices of the team members involved in the multi-media communications session.

64. A distributed application as claimed in claim 63 wherein the distributed application is further adapted to supply each data terminal with a data address of each other data terminal involved in the multi-media communications session to enable automatic setup the exchange of the video data.
65. A distributed application as claimed in claim 63 wherein the distributed application further enables an exchange of at least one of documents and applications during the multi-media session.

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